

Feature Article

The information specialist in an expert role in a capacity building project – a unique possibility to enlarge the library's role and status in higher education

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Abstract

The library of the Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak) was invited to participate in a project "Capacity Building in Crisis Preparedness in Health Care Education – CRIPS" funded by the Higher Education Institutions Institutional Cooperation Instrument HEIICI, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Finland. The Diak Library's representative, Marketta Fredriksson, was named as one of the experts in the project. The paper describes her role and her developmental work as an expert.

Key words: e-learning; capacity building; international cooperation; library services; information literacy.

Introduction

The Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak), Arcada University of Applied Sciences in Finland (Arcada) and the University of Eastern Africa Baraton (UEAB) are currently implementing CRIPS; the project period is 1 March 2013 – 31 December 2015, in total 34 months. CRIPS' objective is to contribute to the enhancement of health in the Kenyan rural communities, in particular in crisis situations. The Project's purpose is to improve the capacities of crisis preparation and the incident and emergency health care both in higher education and among the local health care stakeholders.

Two expected result areas are: 1) implementing and piloting the Joint Master's Degree Programme in Global Health Care and 2) establishing a global health care repository at the University of Eastern Africa Baraton and activating the local use of it. Diak's library is taking part in the activities of both these outcomes. CRIPS is a multi-professional development project; there are almost 20 names on the list of project staff. For the key experts the funding covers for more than 10 days and expert roles for less than 10 days depending on the planned task in the project. There are pedagogical experts (lectures in global health), IT-, e-learning and library professionals and administrative staff from the international affairs of partner universities. Also some

student work is included (database programming, literature review e.g.) under the supervision of the project key experts.

Result area 1 includes several activities such as workshops among the key experts, building up and maintaining an online learning platform (Fronter) for the programme, preparing the application and enrolment procedures, acquiring learning materials, organizing two capacity building seminars for the teachers and local stakeholders in crisis preparedness and global health care, and establishing a network of local health care stakeholders. The programme will be implemented mainly through virtual courses with a few teaching modules in face-to-face contact and will be put into practice through applying the principles of blended learning. Piloting of the programme includes i.a. strengthening the e-learning capacities of UEAB.

In addition to the implementation of the Joint Master's Programme, there is a great deal of work to provide an online repository of the theses and study assignments. The repository will be established mainly by student work, in collaboration with IT-students of Arcada and UEAB, under the supervision of their teacher. The repository will be planned so that there is a possibility of browsing with a mobile device in order to facilitate the use of the repository among local stakeholders.

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How Diak's library came into the CRIPS?

The CRIPS project had already been going on for a while, when staff from Diak's library received an invitation to meet the Project Director and the Vice Chancellor of Diak. They required assistance to define result area 2, a repository for global health care information. That particular meeting was a starting point for a fruitful co-operation and a beginning of a challenging task. After two longer meetings and discussions with the project leaders, I as an information specialist in Diak's library, found myself named as an expert in the project plans. It took some time to read through the various project documents, funding papers, minutes of meetings etc in order to comprehend the CRIPS project. It was easy to become interested in the project as we in Diak's library have had an active role in teaching information literacy and we hold an established position both in curriculum work and implementing teaching, particularly in those study units which include information searching tasks as an essential part of evidence based practice. We have been teaching information literature skills for a long time using techniques which are familiar in blended learning and in that regard to be an expert in the project did not seem such a challenging task as it proved later. Also to get involved in the result area 2, the repository of global health seemed to be interesting since our librarians and information specialists are experts in search indexes and queries and we were familiar with database construction and interface planning while implementing our previous institutional repository.

Goals of librarianship and information literacy matters in the CRIPS project

In result area 1:

- to design and implement an information literacy course in the Fronter learning platform;
- to plan an integration of information literacy matters in all modules of the programme;
- to teach information searching skills so the student is able to find evidence-based material for assignments; also how to evaluate those skills as an essential part of expertness in disaster management;
- to propose literature (both printed and e-material) to the programme;
- to acquire relevant printed material and implement a transfer collection into the UEAB library for the programme;
- to acquire relevant e-books for the programme and provide access via Nelli-portal (National Electronic Library Interface);

- to consult in password policy and information security matters in the future use of the library's licensed resources;
- preliminary work in checking the availability of the relevant content in available e-journals;
- to make field tests in the Fronter platform of workable solutions for the access to all kind of electronic source material (e-journals, e-books, open access material et cetera);
- to contribute to Fronter and Adobe Connect training on UEAB campus for the staff members;
- to take part in the surveying of the infrastructure of UEAB library services and IT;
- to take part in composing the program of different workshop programmes and the practical arrangements
- to share the knowledge of Finnish library and IT practices and library's role in the blended learning;

In result area 2:

- to carry out relevant workshop activities for IT and library participants
- to create appropriate repository policies, e.g. copyright and publishing permission;
- to plan functional practices of adding the materials to the repository;
- to sketch the workflow of feeding the metadata into the repository;
- to consult in the planning of the repository interface and search possibilities and possible thesauri;
- to take part in exploring the rural health care facilities and the IT practice and data transmission circumstances in the area.

These goals will be achieved in co-operation with the libraries of Diak and UEAB.

What kind of CRIPS tasks has been done in Diak's Library so far?

There have been many online meetings. CRIPS partners are using an Adobe Connect online meeting system so that all the participants are able to meet online. I have been invited to key expert and expert meetings and have had several face-to-face appointments with Finnish lecturers regarding course literature, student assignments and repository matters. Several journeys to workshops from Finland to Kenya and from Kenya to Finland have been completed so far. The first workshop in Kenya was October 2012 which included several meetings with the aim of building a network of stakeholders and key persons in civic organisations, local health care professionals and a meeting at the Embassy of Finland in Nairobi. At the end of January, 2013 there was a second

workshop in Helsinki, Finland with many of activities from an administrative point of view and which also included an international seminar “Christian Values and Hope in Health Education”. Participants also visited Diak’s library and were introduced to our collections, services and the library as a whole.

I was offered an opportunity to travel to the UEAB Campus in Kapsapet, Kenya in May 2013. We were four people taking a nine-day trip to Baraton: I as the CRIPS Information Specialist, the Project Director, our e-learning specialist and IT-senior lecturer from Arcada. We had a few days practical training on the Fronter learning platform and held the Adobe Connect online meeting system for the staff of UEAB (*Figure 1*).



Fig. 1. Training session for the UEAB staff in the Fronter learning platform

We screened through UEAB’s library and IT facilities. Closer examination of UEAB library services was an interesting and positive experience; the similarity in information resources and services is evident between UEAB library and ours. The most remarkable difference in UEAB was that the distance use of e-resources was



Fig. 2. Patient accounting in the Mosoriot Health Care facility [picture by Kimmo Turtiainen]

still in a development phase, but they were working on it. Once again I was convinced that library work has



Fig. 3. A field trip to Kapsapet District Hospital in May 2013



Fig. 4. Screening the patient information accounting and health information systems in Kapsapet District Hospital

much in common everywhere although the conditions and operational environment differs. That has been a great basis for a fruitful co-operation in the joint project.

Then we made the most interesting field trip to the rural health care facilities in order to learn about patient accounting, health data transfer methods and IT network solutions in the area with the view to plan the global health care repository (*Figure 2, 3, 4*).

Workshops continued in November 2013 in Helsinki with four lectures and three library- and IT-persons from UEAB. During their stay, we continued with further training of Fronter to strengthen their e-learning skills for their prospective role as a support person for the UEAB. There were also several on the spot trainings in our IT-lab to introduce UEAB staff members to library’s electronic services, the authentication system and how we integrate



Fig. 5. *Workshop activities Helsinki, November 2013*

electronic literature into e-learning courses in the Fronter platform. There were some field trips such as the big communal library Sello where attendees could meet local Kenyan-Finnish organization members and they also had a possibility to screen the Finnish Red Cross crisis preparedness center. Diak's library staff also hosted the closing ceremony of the workshop (Figure 5).

Challenges for the information specialist's work in the CRIPS project

At the moment project guidelines as a whole are almost completed; administrative authorities in both countries have processed the approval of the programme, application and enrollment procedures are done and the period for student application is to begin in March 2014. The Fronter online learning platform has collegially advanced and a great deal of academic content and learning assignment is already there. Training of e-learning tools has been followed through mostly during the workshops. On the whole, the project has advanced surprisingly well in spite of modest resources. Capacity building projects are the most challenging because it is not only that a European counterpart must finish her work, but that the developed together process and new kind of thinking needs to go on after you finish your work in the project, has to be kept in mind, otherwise you have failed with the capacity building and a long-lasting development is lost.

The most tangible challenge during our stay in UEAB was the unstable information network at the Baraton Campus. The internet connection disappeared from time to time or was so weak that we could not reach our e-services at distance. Of course for that reason the on-site training was somewhat ineffective. There was also a storm which damaged the campus network just before our arrival and the repairs were delayed. If this happens

again during our invitational seminar when the joint programme starts in September 2014 and all the students and staff are to come together at Baraton Campus, it will cause a huge problem and harm the whole education project. This is the only one intensive period to teach the students face-to-face how to operate on the learning platform and make them familiar with the library resources and search techniques. What we learned during our stay at Baraton is to try to use, as much as possible, the existing mobile services and develop new ones, such as the CRIPS global health repository interface. In Africa a fixed cable net is vulnerable and too expensive to count on; it is all about mobile services.

The other challenge is the same we face in our everyday work while working in multi-professional teams: how to establish a trustful and equal co-operation where everybody respects each other's expertise and background. A mature project plan and leadership is the key, if everybody has the right understanding and knowledge about what is expected and to whom you can lean on if some problem emerges. Also courage to think out of your own box is required; every now and then, those "stupid questions" you are asking as an outsider leads to reflective and creative new solutions. That is often needed in multicultural situations such as this joint degree is going to be.



Fig. 6. *Project meeting in Helsinki November 2013*

There definitely is going to be major pedagogical challenges as well because the students are presumably coming from pedagogical backgrounds of a very different kind. In Finland a Master Student has to have at least three years relevant work experience after her bachelor exam and in that way they have many years from previous studies and not many of them are familiar with the distance use of library materials. This means to learn away from a traditional view of learning and to

start to rely and share on their existing expertise. It is also a big challenge for the lectures: to acquire the principles of shared knowledge formation and allow the students to bring their knowledge into play and to make the precious applied knowledge regarding nursing and public health visible. In this aspect information literacy studies are in a way, somewhat easier in comparison with the more core substance; it is about training skills and performing assignments on the platform and to have guidance from a librarian or information specialist instead of a professor or lecturer. The challenge is how to integrate information searching skills to professional knowledge, into the study units such as “emergency, disaster preparedness and management”; “crises, globalization and health care” or “basic epidemiology and health situations in the globalizing world”. An evidence-based framework and thinking of course help definitely to legitimize information literacy studies in the programme. I have a plan to connect information searching in the assignments and encourage the lectures to ask for references in all essays and writings the students deposit for evaluation. In that way, the student will receive more training in information literacy skills than if there is only a separate course for these matters. In master thesis studies the student is required to leave an information search plan.

One big challenge is the risk of a possible change of key persons in the project. When there are three universities and a timeline of a couple of years, some changes in the staff will happen and in those cases you have to make a new start and hope for the best. Also the fact that nobody is working full-time for the project has its consequences. The funding will not cover all of your work and that is why you usually do the project activities in addition to your main duties and often even in your own time. The ability to prioritize your tasks and flexible attitude is definitely required. On the other hand what you get is unique experiences and an opportunity to develop your work in a very special way. The relationship between the lecturers and library staff deepens and in that way you can create more definite and deeper collections which serve better your community’s information needs. The Crips project will make me definitely more experienced in creating an e-learning course and tasks and in online-



Fig. 7. Key experts of the CRIPS project, the head nurse and the IT-manager of Mosoriot rural health training center [picture by Kimmo Turtiainen]

teaching and I hope my average level English skills will be improved during the project. It has been a great opportunity to make the long journey to Africa and to be hosted safely there as an honourable guest. The contacts you make with the local people and the learning of how they live their everyday life there, of course, is one of the great experiences you will never forget. In my opinion the CRIPS project is a great way to meet the goals and expectations of the HEI ICI funding: professional development, improved cooperation and definitely, it enables unique and memorable experience exchanges.

Further Reading

Information regarding CRIPS and the Master's Degree in Global Health Care

Karvinen I. (ed.) Love and forgiveness in the global community: designing a Master's Degree in Global Health Care - Master of Health Care. [Helsinki]: Diaconia University of Applied Sciences; 2013. available at <http://www.diak.fi/tyoelama/Julkaisut/D-sarjajulkaisut/Sivut/default.aspx>

Current information on the Master's Degree in Global Health Care

<http://www.diak.fi/hakijalle/Koulutusohjelmat/Ylempi%20amk/Sivut/Master%27s-Degree-in-Global-Health-Care.aspx>

HEI ICI programme and funding

http://www.cimo.fi/programmes/hei_ici/projects/crips